

Mr. CARDIN thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 3 hours this morning. The reason for the inordinate amount of time is that—I will make a presentation in a little bit to get this started—we have more than 100 pieces of legislation that are held up, legislation that could move so very quickly, in a matter of minutes. But we cannot do that because there are Republican holds on these bills.

So we are going to go through our period of time this morning, asking consent to move to these bills. We hope some of them will pass. Some of them we should get done.

The leading cause of death in 20 States in the United States for children under age 14 is getting caught in the drains of swimming pools. It has been somewhat noted because John Edwards had one of the first legal cases in that regard.

Alaska, where you would not think there are a lot of swimming pools, or at least I would not, but there obviously are lots of swimming pools, that is the leading cause of death in Alaska for children.

We have a hold on that bill. It passed the House with three dissenting votes, 418 to 3. We cannot pass that. There are children dying while we are not able to proceed on something such as that. There are over 100 issues similar to that. It is not right. So if people wonder why we are spending so much time, that is the reason. Maybe we will get some of these people who are on the other side of the aisle who object to this to come, rather than these hidden holds, and speak.

It is not good for the body. If there are problems with a piece of legislation, that is one thing. But take that one case as an example. Following morning business, we will conduct two rollcall votes in relation to the two Gregg amendments. Other amendments will be debated following the Gregg votes and more rollcall votes will occur through the day and into the evening.

I would like to commend Senators HARKIN and CHAMBLISS for their work they have accomplished in getting an agreement with respect to the amendments. As to the list of amendments right now, all 20 Republican amendments have been offered; the Democrats have offered 8 or 9.

The work they have done in the last few days I think has been exemplary. While they were successful in getting agreements on these amendments,

other amendments will still need to be debated and voted on or accepted by the two managers.

As the year comes to a close, and the first year of the 110th Congress winds down, there is no doubt, if we continue in the current direction, this will be known as the Congress of Republican obstruction.

Already, in 1 year, Republicans have arrived at the all-time obstruction record for a full 2-year session. What we are seeing this year from Republicans is not ordinary obstruction, it is obstruction on steroids. It is terribly damaging to the American people. I do not question the right of Republicans to block bills, in fact, block bill after bill; that is how the Senate has worked. And we all play by the same rules. But because you have the right does not make it right.

On a daily basis, Republican Senators talk about the lack of progress this year. For all we have done, why have we not done more, they say. The answer is obstruction, Republican obstruction. It is disingenuous for Republicans to complain about a lack of progress and then make a concerted effort to block change—

Obstruction of the prescription drug bill, to make medicines more affordable. We have been able to accomplish a lot, but it has been difficult when we have had to file about 60 cloture petitions.

We have been able to do some good things with the minimum wage, 9/11 Commission recommendations, the landmark ethics and lobbying reform, we have done some good work with mine resistant combat vehicles, we have given the National Guard equipment they need, we have stepped in and looked at the plight of American veterans based on the Walter Reed scandal.

We have revitalized the Gulf Coast after Katrina, disaster relief for small business and farmers, Western wildfire relief. We have looked into the scandal relating to the U.S. attorneys. We passed legislation to help correct that. We have passed the WRDA, Water Resources Development Act, and a competitiveness bill led by Senators BINGAMAN and ALEXANDER, we have been able to get that done.

We have done the most significant change to college education since the GI Bill of Rights. We have been able to do some good things regarding the Internet, keeping the Internet tax free, expanding Head Start. We have done some good things.

But we have been stopped from doing other important things. The prescription drug bill is a perfect example. As we speak, companies can go negotiate for lower priced drugs for their employees. The Veterans' Administration can negotiate for lower prices for veterans but Medicare cannot. There is a prohibition that Medicare cannot negotiate for lower priced drugs. That should be changed. We tried to change it. It was blocked; obstruction of our efforts to

change the course in Iraq; obstruction of our efforts to pass an AMT fix in a fiscally responsible way; obstruction of our FHA bill, a bill that President Bush has called upon us to pass that would help Americans save their homes from foreclosure.

These are a few of the well-known examples. My Democratic colleagues and I this morning are going to talk about some of the lesser known priorities Republicans have blocked. These bills might not make headlines, but they will make a difference in people's lives, such as the swimming pool drains I talked about.

All these bills we will seek to pass today will make our country stronger. Every single one of them has fallen victim to Republican obstruction. There are no serious complaints about the bills which we seek to pass this morning, at least I do not think so. Many of them have already more than 50 cosponsors, Democrats and Republicans—we acknowledge mostly Democrats but Democrats and Republicans.

Many have already been overwhelmingly passed by the House of Representatives and could be sent to the President's desk this afternoon. This morning's bills, though, are the tip of the iceberg. We can come to the floor tomorrow or the next day and days after that and seek action on bills similar to these that we are going to talk about.

So we hope in the coming hours, the Republican minority will call off their needless holds, call off their obstruction, call off their political posturing and start working with us to make life better for the American people.

As I indicated, a number of my colleagues will follow. What I am going to talk about now, I am going to talk about the ALS registry—ALS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, the Lou Gehrig's disease, this great first baseman for the New York Yankees who was a man of iron who could not overcome this disease.

Similar to all people who get this disease, from the time it is discovered until you die is an average of 18 months. We have all had friends and relatives who have suffered and died from this disease. It is caused by a degeneration of the nerve cells that control voluntary muscle, which causes muscle weakness and atrophy. It is nearly always fatal. It may give victims, as I have indicated, a short time to live.

Once in a while you find someone who lives several years, and that is a blessing in their lives. Early this year, a woman named Kathie Barrett and her husband Martin traveled to Washington, DC, from Sparks, NV, to advocate on behalf of the ALS registry.

What is a registry? It is the first step to solve the problems of disease. Many years ago, they developed a cancer registry. I was involved in setting up one for a disease called interstitial cystitis. It is a disease that afflicts mostly women; 90 percent of the people who